# EDDIFY ME

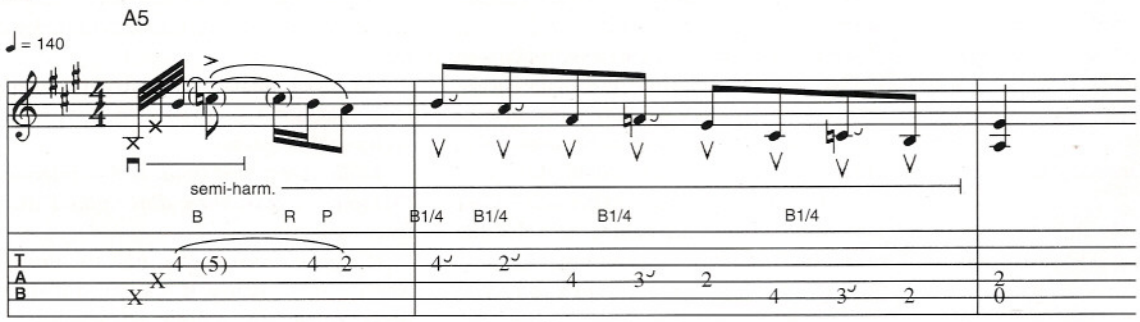
## How Van Halen Rewrote the Guitar Rule Book

You can't escape Eddie Van Halen's contributions to the collective guitar consciousness. From the top of the charts to movie and TV music to local guitar shop "spoo" (see *The Real Frank Zappa Book* for an explanation of this term), you'll find ample evidence of Edward's indelible mark. To the legions weaned on his playing, it's a given that Van Halen wrote the book on contemporary hard-rock guitar. But those who cut their teeth on late '60s and early '70s rock are also in Eddie's debt; he redefined the mechanics of heavy guitar just when screamin' solos had become a lost, even scorned, art. When Van Halen hit the scene, the tables turned almost overnight. It was more than okay to play hot, wild guitar on virtually any gig; it was expected. Eddie made it safe to play again!

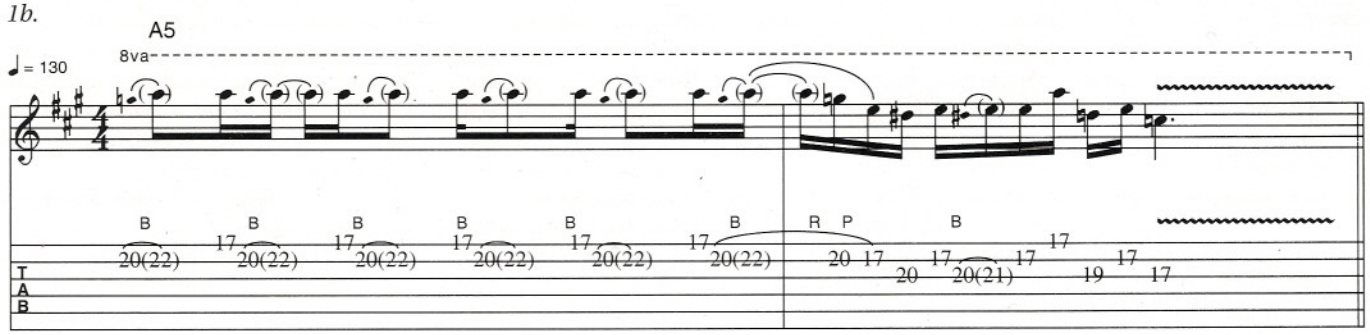
Examples 1a through 1d are characteristic of Van Halen's "beyond blues" approach to pentatonic- and blues-scale material. Squawky pick harmonics and descending chromatic passing tones enhance the short *A* pentatonic-major fill in Ex. 1a. Ex. 1b begins with a syncopated, three-against-four motive derived from the seventeenth-position *A* pentatonic-minor scale. The 2nd (*F*♯) and 6th (*C*♯) lend Ex. 1c a Dorian vibe, while Ex. 1d blends *B* blues and Dorian elements.

**By Jesse Gress**

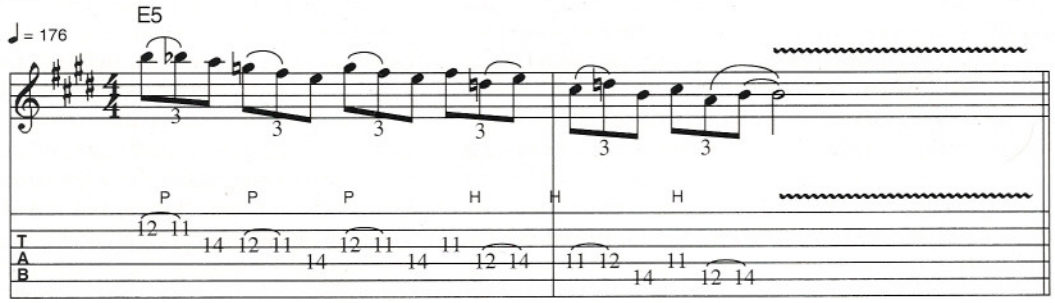
*Ex. 1a.*



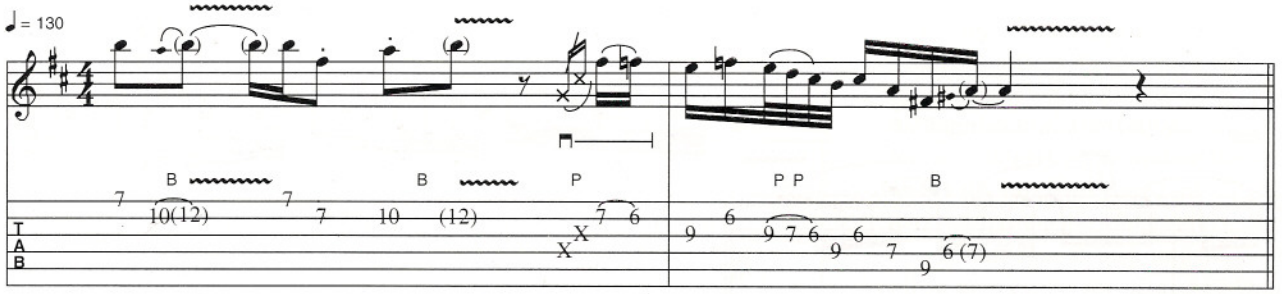

*Ex. 1b.*




*Ex. 1c.*

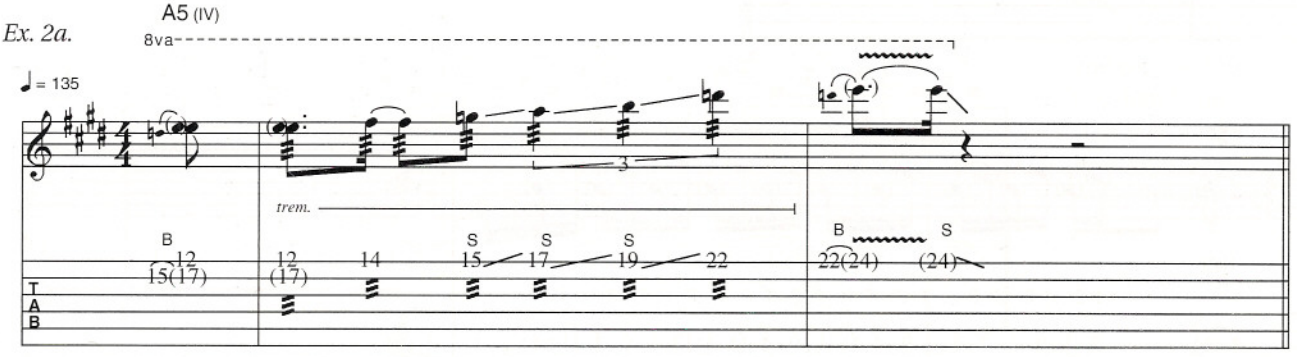


*Ex. 1d.* Bm7

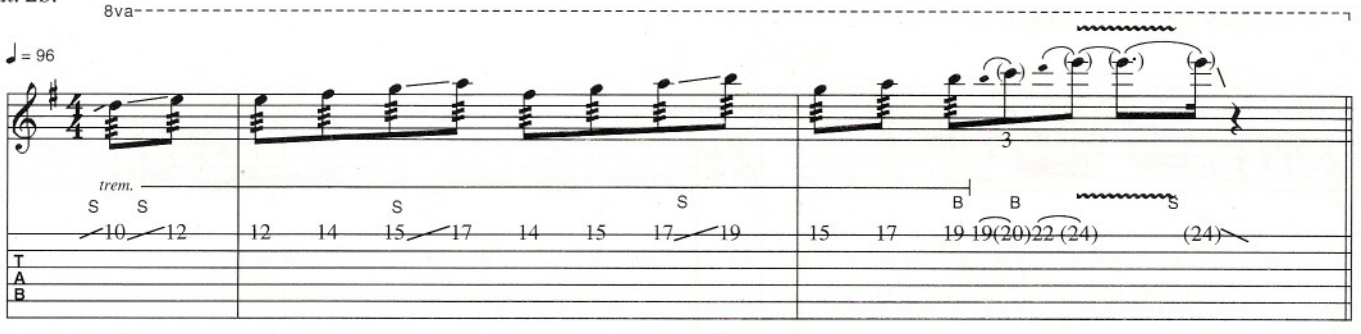



Many of Edward's solos climax with a precise, tremolo-picked single-string ascent followed by a high bend; the version shown in Ex. 2a is played over the IV chord (*A* in the key of *E*). The variation in Ex. 2b approaches the final bend with a short, repeated melodic sequence

*Ex. 2a.* A5 (IV)

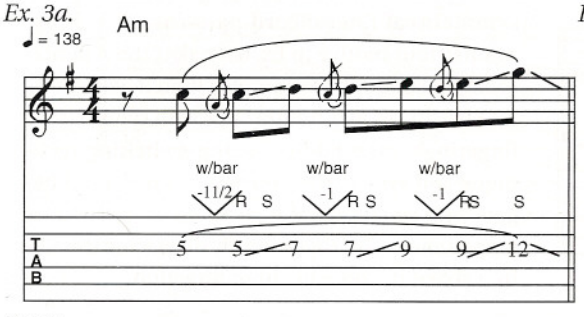



*Ex. 2b.* Em

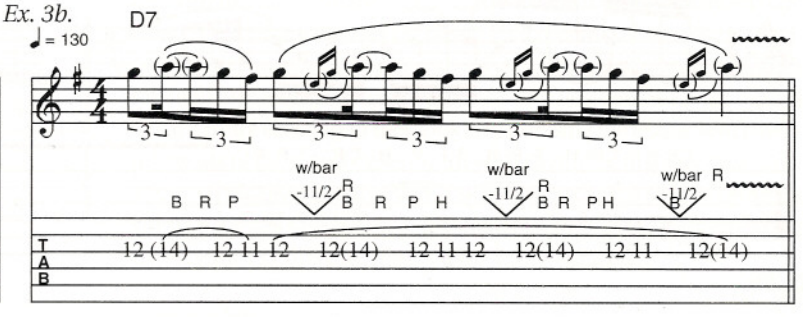



One of the most important whammy-bar innovators since Hendrix, Eddie makes frequent use of "bar-as-pick" articulations. In Ex. 3a, for example, a single pick attack accommodates the entire ascending *A* pentatonic-minor lick. Bar articulations combine with hammer-ons and pull-offs for the Mixolydian riff in Ex. 3b. The seventeenth-position *A* pentatonic-minor lick in Ex. 3c shifts mid-measure to a three-against-four "bar-picked" pattern with hammer-ons and pull-offs.

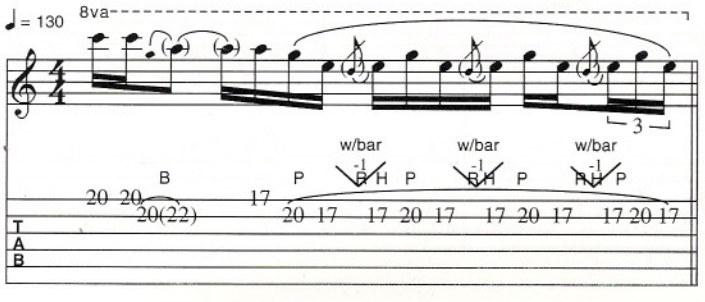
*Ex. 3a.* Am




*Ex. 3b.* D7

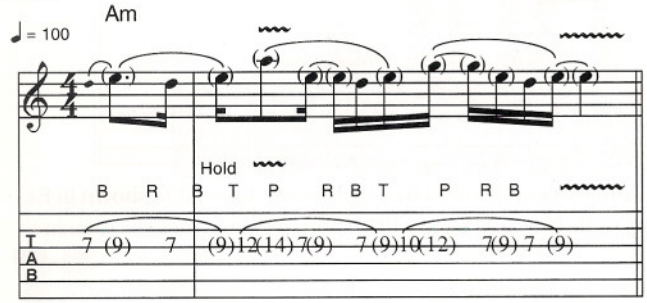



*Ex. 3c.* Am

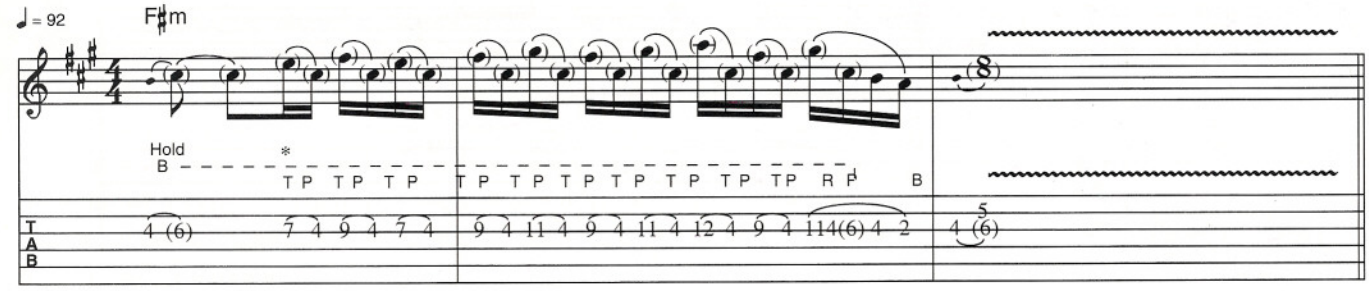



Perhaps the earliest tapping technique to catch on widely was to add notes above a bend held by the fretting hand. Ex. 4 illustrates a blend of bending, tapping, releasing, and pulling off. In Ex. 5a the bent note becomes a pedal tone beneath a tapped melody that outlines an F♯ minor melodic sequence. The pedal-tone taps in Ex. 5b use descending chromatic tones for a quick, bluesy cadence; the final tonic is tapped one fret lower to compensate for the half-step bend. In Ex. 5c, the fret hand pedals two notes while the taps do the walkin'.

*Ex. 4.*

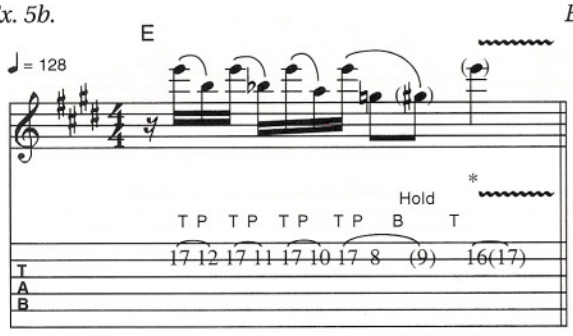



*Ex. 5a.*



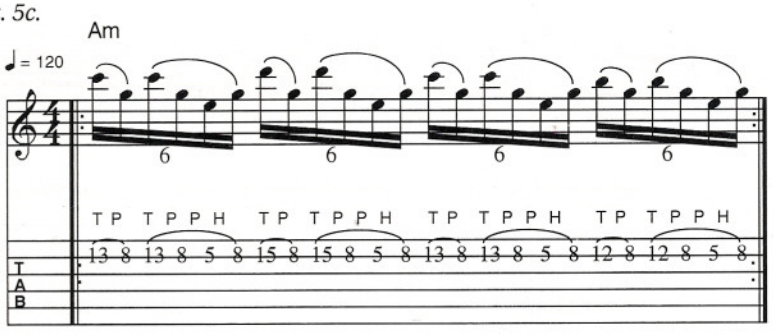

* Taps and pull-offs written at actual fretboard positions while bend is held (this example only)

*Ex. 5b.*

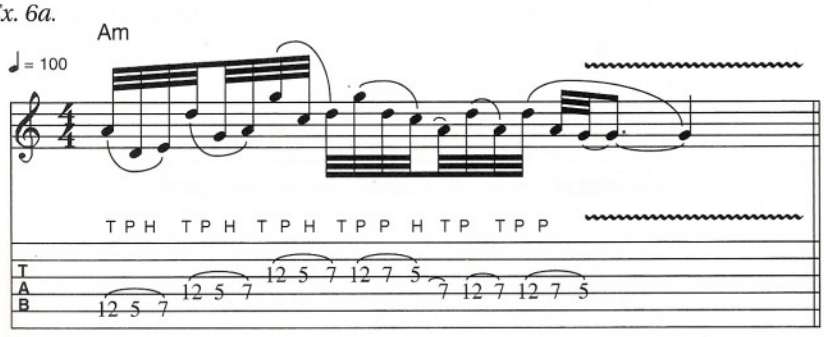



* vibrato with fret hand

*Ex. 5c.*

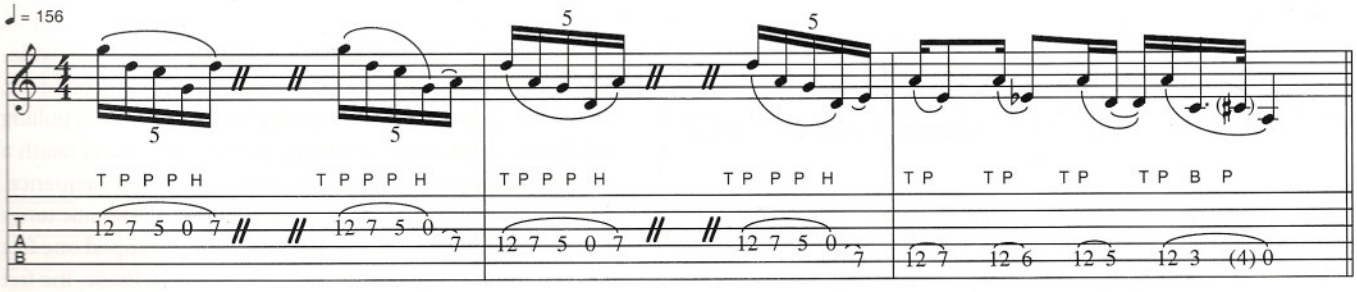



*Ex. 6a.*

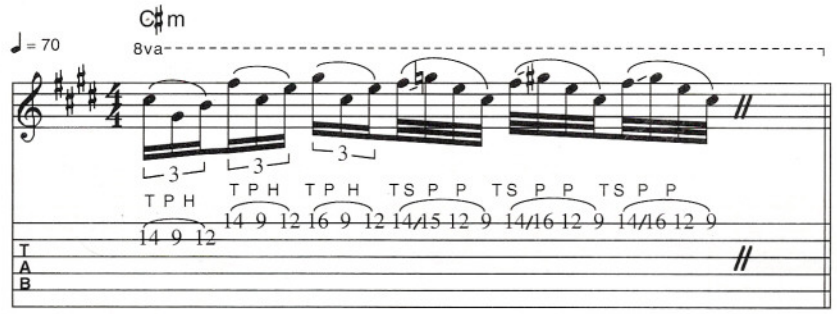



Many of Edward's tapped figures are based on symmetrical fingerboard patterns. The three-against-four motive in Ex. 6a makes the *A* pentatonic riff sound more complex than it actually is. Ex. 6b features five-note groups with symmetrical fingerings; note Eddie's string-switching technique and syncopated, bluesy cadence. Ex. 7 begins with symmetrical taps and then introduces tapped slides. Try rhythmically displacing this lick by a sixteenth-note in either direction.

*Ex. 6b.*

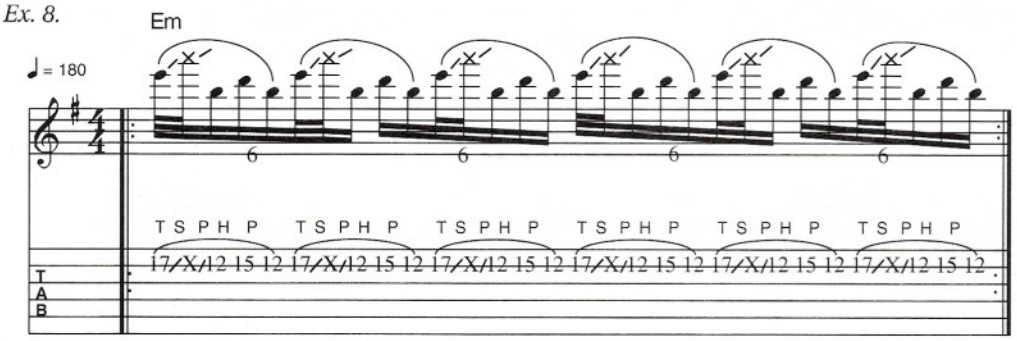


*Ex. 7.*

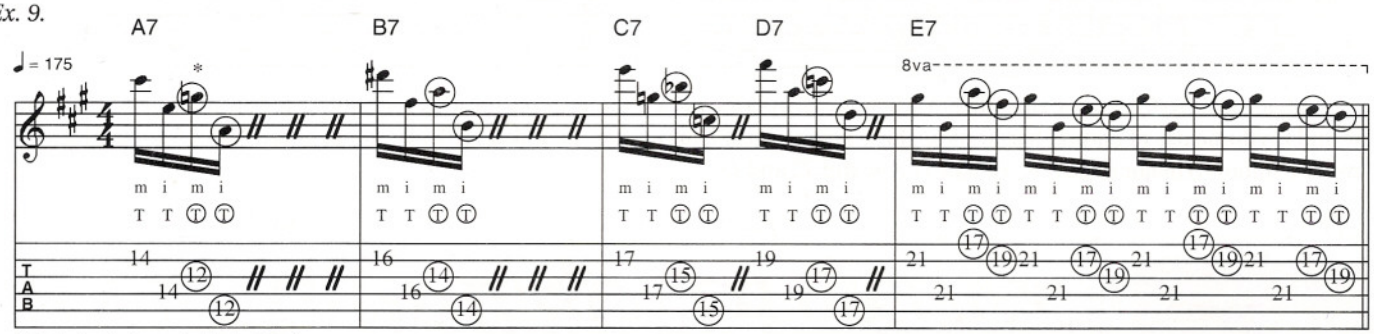



Devilishly fast tapped slides zip off the fingerboard in Ex. 8. To play the piano-style taps in Ex. 9, place your fretting hand over the top of the fingerboard and tap with your middle (m) and index (i) fingers while muting the strings towards the nut with your pinky. The picking hand, also using the middle and index fingers, taps symmetrical shapes until the last bar. The riff outlines *A7, B7, C7, D7,* and *E7.* Shift back to a conventional fretting-hand grip for the percussive Ex. 10. First learn the picking-hand tapping pattern—between the thumb (p) and index finger (i)—and then add the muted fretting-hand taps. This thumb/slap action is rooted in funk bass. Start slowly, gradually working it up to tempo.

*Ex. 8.*

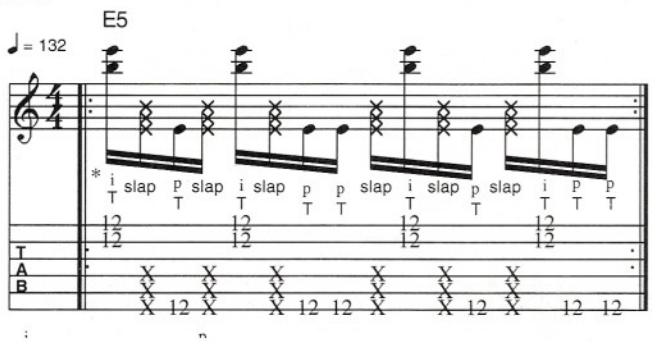



*Ex. 9.*



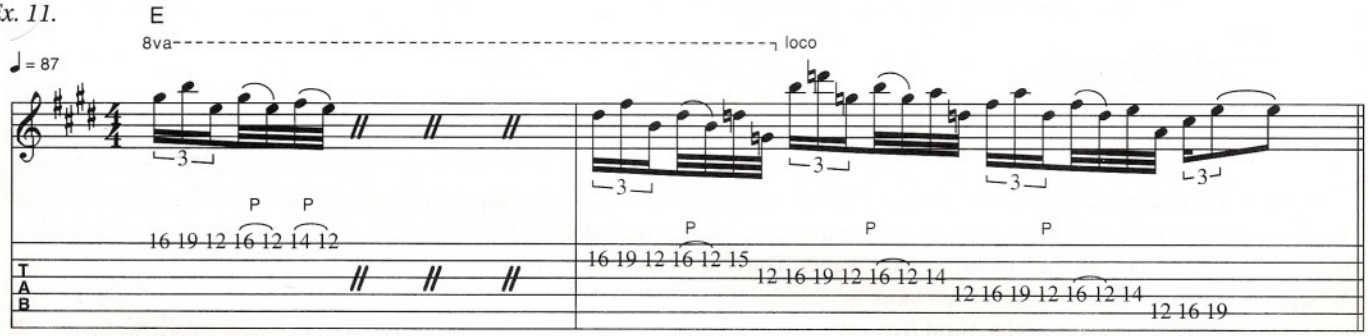

* Circled notes tapped with pick hand.

*Ex. 10.*

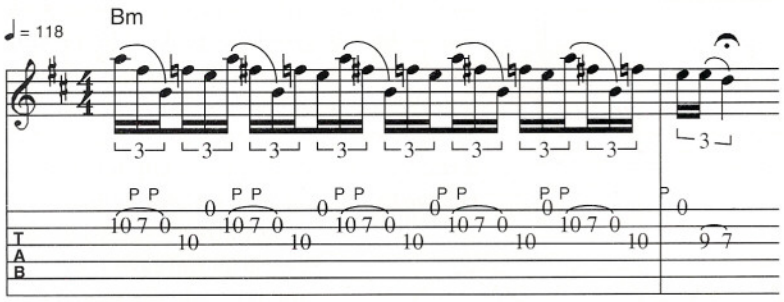



Van Halen's faux-tapping has fooled the best of us. Ex. 11 features conventional picking, but its wide fretting-hand stretches and symmetrical shapes simulate a tapped sound. Eddie also uses cross-picking with unexpected open-string punctuation for a "phantom tap" effect. Ex. 12a, an angular riff based on a repeated five-note motive, contains a surprise open *E.* Try this shape accented in groups of both four and five, as well as in different fretboard positions. The fast triplets in Ex. 12b are easier than they look. Try phrasing the example in rhythmic units of four, and experiment with rhythmic displacement. Ex. 12c is a typically inventive Van Halen ear-catcher: A simple fifth-position *A* pentatonic-minor scale gets the cross-picked/open-string treatment. Try this one phrased in "fours" as well.

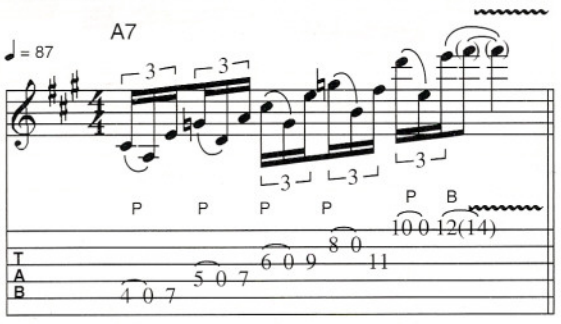
*Ex. 11.*



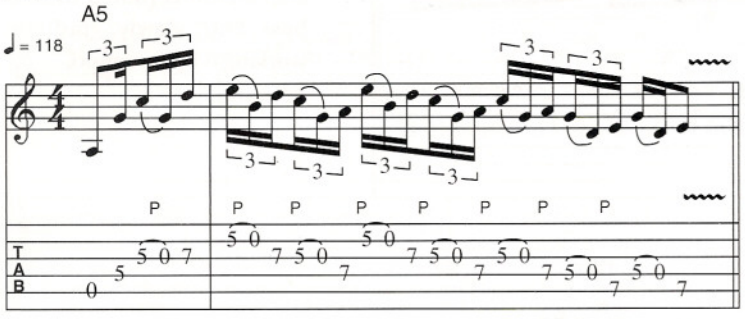
*Ex. 12a.*



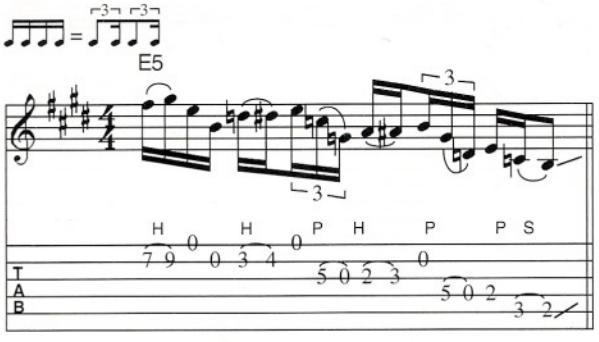

*Ex. 12b.*




*Ex. 12c.*

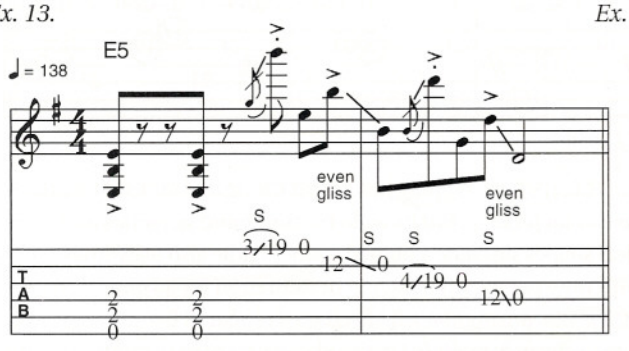



*Ex. 12d.*

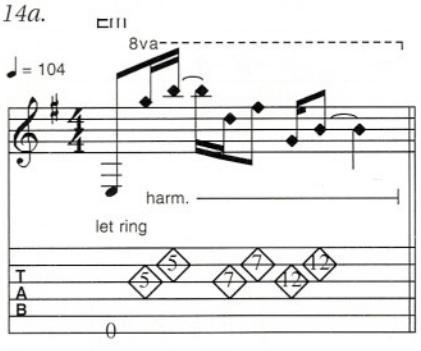



With its Beck-styled "string zips," Ex. 13 is literally all over the neck. Examples 14a through 14d showcase Edward's creative melodic and rhythmic use of natural harmonics. These licks suggest *E* minor, but they also work over other chords built from the harmonized *E* minor/*G* major scale (i.e., *F♯m♭5, G, Am, Bm, C,* and *D*).

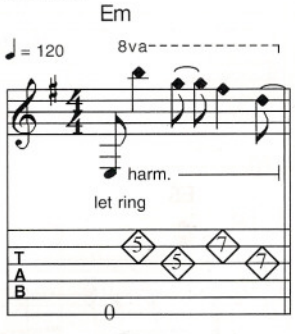
*Ex. 13.*



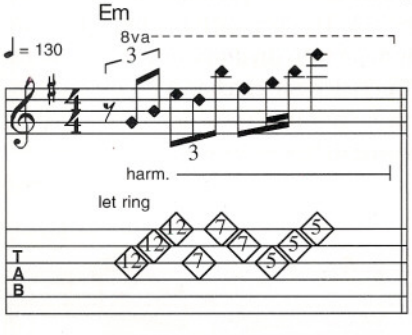

*Ex. 14a.*



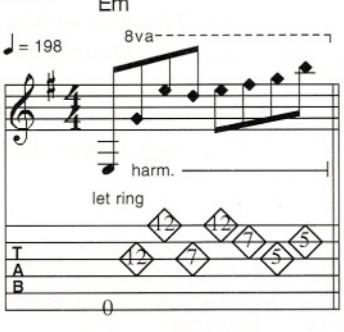

*Ex. 14b.*



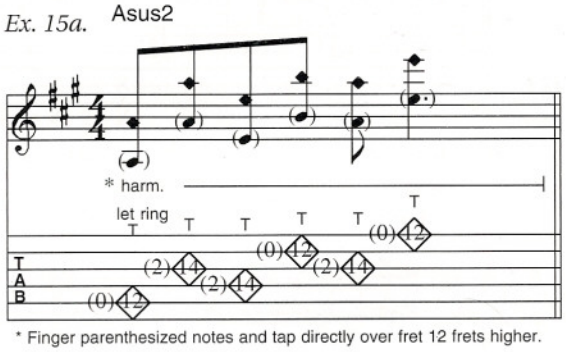

*Ex. 14c.*




*Ex. 14d.*



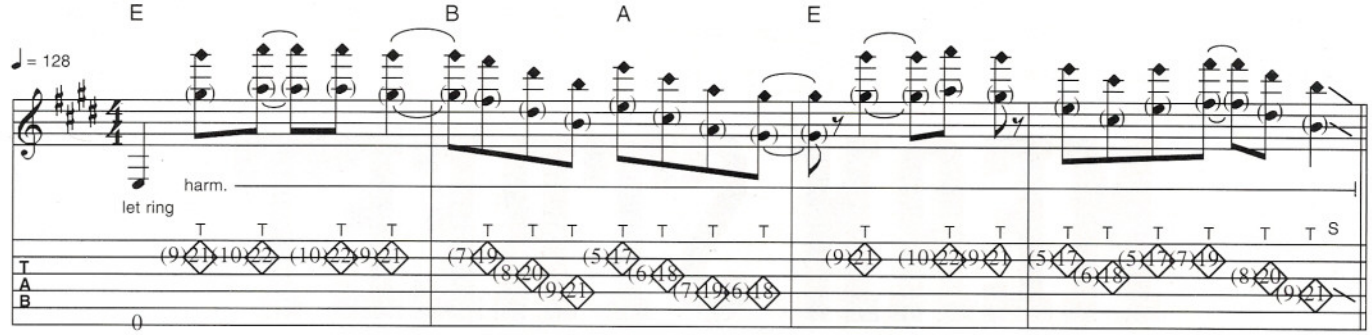

*Ex. 15a.*

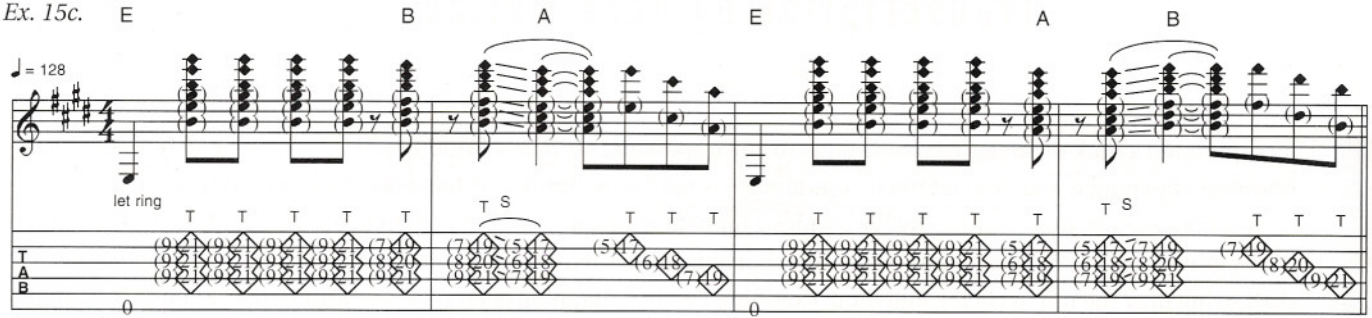



* Finger parenthesized notes and tap directly over fret 12 frets higher.

Ex. 15a is a virtual tapped-harmonics primer. To sound the harmonics, finger the *Asus2* chord and use short, sharp tap attacks (think "finger mallet") directly on the fret wire, 12 frets above each open or fretted note. The melody in Ex. 15b is built from chord shapes; finger each one and tap out the melody 12 frets higher. The tapped chordal harmonics in Ex. 15c are a fleshed-out variation of 15b. For tapped-harmonic chords, switch from tapping with your fingertips to the underside of your index finger. Angle your finger to approximate the diagonal shape of the *A* and *B* chords. Sympathetic notes held with the fretting hand will bleed through randomly. ■

*Ex. 15b.*




*Ex. 15c.*